Imperial Names for "Practical Cats": Establishing a Distinctly British Pride in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*

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T. S. Eliot provides three categories — the familial, the particular, and the secretive — to delineate the naming of cats in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*; however, the poet's categories fail to explain completely his onomastic decisions. Instead, Eliot's naming process reflects the Anglophile's acquired British tastes. London, a city of Anglican churches and secular theatres, is home to Eliot's fictional cats and an influence upon many of his name choices. Literary sources, in particular British Nonsense poets, provide additional inspiration for the 54 cat names mentioned in Eliot's volume.

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In *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, first published in 1939, poet T. S. Eliot (1888–1965) replicates London society through nomenclature that reveals the ranks, occupations, and personalities of the characters — from guttersnipe tom to imperial pussy — that prowl through his collection. Despite his claim in "The Naming of Cats" that bequeathing such names "is a difficult matter" (1980: 149), Eliot names cats as prolifically as the creatures themselves reproduce. In only fourteen poems, he provides a total of fifty-four proper names, nicknames, and breed names (Appendix A). Additionally, Eliot supplies readers with categories for feline names: the familial, the particular, and the secretive — the last rarely revealed to humans. Perhaps because the work concerns cats and not people, *Practical Cats* is often neglected by Eliot scholars, although the poet himself reminds readers in "The Ad-dressing of Cats" that "cats are much like you and me / and other people whom we find" (1980: 169). The volume's whimsical tone is established chiefly through the names themselves. Portia Williams Weiskel describes Eliot's multi-syllabic creations like *Macavity*, *Rum Tum Tugger*, and *Skimbleshanks* as "bewitching names" (2003: 72). Unfortunately, such charms often alienate serious Eliot scholars, a category from which I exclude myself in the act of writing this article. Raffel Burton typifies this

group when he dismisses the cat poems as "pleasant, inoffensive, and unremarkable" (1972: 146). I counter that the poems in *Practical Cats* are remarkable and deserving of study. As Anne H. Lambert observes, "despite the enormous popularity of *Cats*, little attention has been paid to the genesis of Eliot's cat names" (1990: 39). Certainly, Eliot's unique cat names merit further consideration.

That names, bewitching or otherwise, are central to the work is supported by their abundance. Of the fourteen poems contained in the original volume, only the first and last poems contain no feline names in their titles or first lines. Instead "The Naming of Cats" discusses the process it announces and "The Ad-dressing of Cats" imparts proper etiquette for the use of such names. Between these instructive book-ends, all twelve internal poems contain feline names in their titles descriptive of the type of cat or cats featured (Appendix B). Ten of the twelve internal poems contain a feline name or names in their opening lines. Of these ten poems, eight state the featured cat's name as the first word in the opening line as in "Macavity's a Mystery Cat" (Eliot, 1980: 163). Two poems delay the name's announcement until the end of the first line: "I have a Gumbie Cat in mind, her name is Jennyanydots" (1980: 150) and "You ought to know Mr Mistoffelees!" (1980: 161). The two internal poems that postpone the announcements of their respective cats' names beyond their first lines do so for dramatic effect. In "Of the Awefull Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles Together with Some Account of the Participation of the Pugs and the Poms, and the Intervention of the Great Rumpuscat," the delayed revelation of the cat's name until line 51 — it is similarly delayed in the title — heightens readers' suspense. The cat is not identified until the poem's moment of crisis when he arrives late to the scene to disperse the riotous dogs: "When suddenly, up from a small basement flat, / Why who should stalk out but the GREAT RUMPUSCAT" (1980: 160). In "Skimbleshanks: The Railway Cat," the name is postponed until line 3 to emphasize the cat's absence:

> There's a whisper down the line at 11:39
> When the Night Mail's ready to depart,
> Saying "Skimble where is Skimble has he gone to hunt the thimble?
> We must find him or the train can't start." (1980: 167)

Apparently, Skimble must be absent in name as well as in body to necessitate a search by railway personnel.

The namer of these London cats, T. S. Eliot, began life not in England, but in the United States of America. Still, even as a boy in St Louis, Missouri, Eliot aspired to all things British. As an adult he journeyed to London, where he embraced British publishing, British literature, and British religion. In 1927 he made his allegiance official, attaining British citizenship and joining the Anglican Church. As Ellyn Sanna observes, "As Eliot grew older, he took on a new persona — the perfect Englishman" (2003: 28). The names that Eliot selects for his feline characters appear to be part of his acquired imperial tastes. After all, his are the monikers of distinctly London cats; they are not the practical names of Midwestern barn cats. The classification system Eliot provides in "The Naming of Cats" is useful for readers and applicable to select poems in the volume. However, Eliot's categories inadequately account for nick-names, breed names, titles, and descriptive names applied to certain notorious cats.

Other sources (historic, literary, religious, and geographic) familiar to Eliot at the time of the volume's composition offer further insights into Eliot's matrix of feline names.

Titular names

An examination of names in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* begins with those names featured in the volume's title: *Old Possum* and *Practical Cats*. *Old Possum* is a nickname bestowed upon Eliot by fellow poet and American expatriate Ezra Pound (1885–1972). Eliot biographer James Miller mentions that "Friends and acquaintances throughout Eliot's life referred to his reserve, his quiet presence and cautious or measured speech, his secretiveness in the guise of 'Old Possum'" (2005: 20). Eliot was aware of his reputation and of the accompanying nickname. *Old Possum* became a moniker the poet embraced and his personal pseudonym. Hence *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* is code for *T. S. Eliot's Book of Practical Cats*. Ostensibly Eliot's alter ego, Old Possum, has collected these insights into feline lives and behaviors; by extension, Old Possum's double, T. S. Eliot, is simultaneously poet and narrator of the collection.

The second name in the title, *Practical Cats*, is a misnomer. While the subject is seemingly cats, there is nothing practical about them, from their quirky names to their antics. The cats' oddly human activities include a navy battle with foreign cats, a soiree at the Jellico Ball, a theatrical performance, and petty thievery. The atypically named *Mr Mistoffelees* (a respelling of the demon Mephistopheles from the Faust legend) like *mist* fades *off* with *ease*. He is the "Original Conjuring Cat" (Eliot, 1980: 161) whose finest trick involves disappearing from sight. The dapper Bustopher Jones frequents gentlemen's clubs, earning him his title, "the St James Street Cat" (1980: 166). Likely his forename *Bustopher* is a "blend of 'Christopher' and 'Buster'" (Lambert, 1990: 41), while his surname *Jones* evokes his ordinariness. Despite the cat's moniker, suggestive of working-class origins — pubs, not clubs — the portly Bustopher Jones may be the only authentic aristo*cat* in Eliot's collection. Bustopher is proclaimed the "Brummell of Cats" (Eliot, 1980: 166) in reference to George Brummell (1778–1840), a Regency dandy whose fashion sense inspired the tailored suit (Kelly, 2005). Certainly, neither Mr Mistoffelees nor Bustopher Jones, nor any of the members of the pride that inhabit the volume, is a practical cat. From battling to dancing to conjuring to clubbing, Eliot's cats are models for Londoners' own idiosyncratic behaviors and personalities. Given the dearth of anything practical in this collection, and the interchangeability between feline and human activities and personalities, a more accurate title might read *Old Possum's Book of Impractical Humans*, but much of the poetry's humor derives from such connections and disjunctions.

The familiar, the particular, and the secretive

T. S. Eliot explicates his own classification system in the introductory poem, "The Naming of Cats." After declaring in line four that "a cat must have THREE DIFFERENT NAMES" (1980: 149), Eliot provides distinct categories from which the manda-

tory names emerge: the familial, the particular, and the secretive. Typically, familial names refer to names culled from a family lineage, a practice established to honor ancestors and relatives. Bequeathing family names is a form of onomastic replication; however, Eliot's use of the familial differs. Instead he refers to names "that the family use daily, / Such as Peter, Augustus, Alonzo or James, / Such as Victor or Jonathan, George or Bill Bailey — / All of them sensible everyday names" (1980: 149). These cat names are interchangeable with human names. Eliot might be christening people, which may be his point. Family pets are often referred to as children, on occasion to the chagrin of the human offspring. Eliot's arrangement of names contributes to the poem's humor. He disrupts the single name procession by ending his first series of familial names with a two-word construction *Bill Bailey*, a cat, no doubt, that strays and a name borrowed from the 1902 song "(Won't You Come Home) Bill Bailey," a work still popular at the time of the cat poems' composition.

The second list of familial names includes "fancier names" that "sound sweeter" (Eliot, 1980: 149): *Plato*, *Admetus*, *Electra*, and *Demeter*. Derived from an ancient philosopher, a mythological king, a tragic princess, and a goddess of agriculture, these are hardly names readers would consider familial or common. In fact, readers might sense the opposite: that these are highly unusual names that bestow great distinction upon the household pets that bear them. Yet following each list of names, Old Possum emphasizes, "All of them sensible everyday names" (1980: 149). Eliot's insistence upon "all" in this twice-repeated statement appears significant. As readers we are dissuaded from re-categorizing the names according to our own conceptions. For W. F. Jackson Knight, these Greco-Roman names suggest "the intimacy in which Eliot possesses classical things, and words, and names" (1958: 128), but certainly Eliot knew how incongruous these classical names would sound to readers within the context of the familial. While names on the first list like *Jonathan* and *Peter* appear sufficiently ordinary, names on the second list like *Plato* and *Demeter* appear archaic; hence Eliot's reiteration of "sensible" and "everyday" in connection with these names is for comic effect, upsetting readers' expectations of what constitutes "sensible" and "everyday" in terms of pet names.

Eliot's second category involves the selection of a "name that's particular" (1980: 149) to each cat, one he further characterizes as possessing the oppositional qualities of peculiarity and dignity. Few names are simultaneously "peculiar" and "dignified" (1980: 149), but Eliot's concoctions, like *Munkustrap*, *Quaxo*, *Coricopat*, *Bombalurina*, and *Jellylorum*, embody both traits. *Coricopat* appears a linguistic variation of *Calico Cat*, a name popularized by American Eugene Field (1850–1895) in his 1904 children's poem, "The Duel." Field's feuding Gingham Dog and Calico Cat disappear and the narrator suggests "the truth about the cat and pup / Is this: they ate each other up" (1925: 129). Eliot's *Coricopat* evokes a less volatile Calico Cat, one that enjoys being patted, perhaps by a little girl with a lisp. Similarly, his *Bombalurina* combines *bomb* with *ballerina*, certainly oppositional images that inspire readers to imagine a once lithe feline grown weighty or perhaps a cat that is balletic despite its girth. These fanciful names, obviously Eliot's inventions, have led critics to compare Eliot to British Nonsense poets. Hugh Dinwiddy hears "echoes of Edward Lear" (1958: 93) in the cat poems and Anne H. Lambert asserts "in inventing nonsense words and names, [Eliot] was influenced by Lear" (1990: 40). Elizabeth Sewell

identifies Lewis Carroll (1832–1898) as "the best interpreter we have for Mr Eliot" and claims that "*Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats*, Mr Eliot's overt Nonsense work, is not a chance production, the master in a lighter mood. It is integral to the whole body of his work, and a Key to his poetry [. . .]" (1958: 51). Whether or not *Practical Cats* provides a key to Eliot's entire oeuvre is debatable, but certainly Eliot's "The Naming of Cats" provides guidelines for reading his cat poems. Eliot insists that names in this second category "never belong to more than one cat" (1980: 149), emphasizing the personal over the generic. Undoubtedly, particular names like *Munkustrap* and *Jellylorum* are one of a kind.

If T. S. Eliot, who possessed so many fine feline qualities, were to actually be a cat, his familial name should be recorded as either *Thomas* or its appropriate short form, *Tom*. Arguably, Eliot's particular name "that never belong[s] to more than one cat" might be *Old Possum*, but could his "ineffable" (1980: 149) name ever be discerned? Of this third name, Old Possum notes:

> But above and beyond there's still one name left over,
> And that is the name that you never will guess;
> The name that no human research can discover —
> But THE CAT HIMSELF KNOWS, and will never confess. (1980: 149)

This last bit of information is particularly disheartening to a human researcher seeking to understand Eliot's naming of cats. This secret name is safeguarded by its cat that is "engaged in a rapt contemplation / Of the thought, of the thought, of the thought of his name" (1980: 149), but not, evidently, in its vocalization.

While this unique name, one that seems to reside at the level of the cat's very soul, appears beyond mortal discovery, in his concluding poem, "The Ad-dressing of Cats," Eliot leaves open the prospect that the third name might be revealed to a worthy recipient. To acquire such information, a human must follow appropriate protocol, which Eliot details in the poem. Following a polite bow, a person may address the cat whose name is sought. Old Possum recommends the salutatory "O CAT!" (1980: 170). Once the cat and human have maintained an acquaintance over a period of time, more familiar titles may be employed, such as the jazzy "OOPSA CAT!" (1980: 170). *Oopsa Cat* is a title that substitutes for the cat's familial name, which the narrator has overheard, but desists from using: "I think I've heard them call him James — / But we've not got so far as names" (1980: 170). The next step in this pseudo-courtship ritual involves offering tempting morsels. Beyond the universal "dish of cream," the supplicant might provide the cat with distinctly British fare such as "Strassburg Pie," "potted grouse," "salmon paste," or "rabbit" (1980: 171). If this gustatory stage is successful, the following onomastic revelation may occur: "And so in time you reach your aim, / And finally call him by his NAME" (1980: 171). Yet, even in the process of describing how the penultimate name might be discovered, Eliot desists from proclaiming it, maintaining an aura of onomastic mystery. Thus the sample cat for Eliot's etiquette lesson bears the familial name *James* and the particular name *Oopsa Cat*, but his secret name is known only to the cat itself, and, as suggested in the poem, one special person, who may or may not be the reader, dependent upon the reader's imaginative faculties.

Insufficiencies in Eliot's onomastic system

Despite the charm of Eliot's triadic schematic, it fails to account for the variety of names and name types that proliferate in his collection. According to the poet's rules, every cat in this volume should possess three names, two to which readers are privy and one secretive name, but this tripartite division proves more often to be the exception. In particular, Eliot's system cannot account for nicknames, names identifying personality types, titles, and breed names that fall outside of his prescribed categories. While such names appear in various poems throughout the volume, the third poem will serve as a case study of the inadequacies in Eliot's system.

Names associated with the titular cat and other felines in "Growltiger's Last Stand" exceed the boundaries of Eliot's classification system as confirmed by the presence of nicknames, names identifying personality types, titles, and breed names. Based upon the name's peculiarity and its dignity, and the fact that it resembles no human name current or ancient and hence is not a familial name, *Growltiger* is, in terms of Eliot's schematic, a particular name, a name that belongs to one cat. A simple reversal of components reveals that the name is also descriptive: *Growltiger* is a tiger that growls or at least a cat that growls like a tiger. Old Possum announces that "Growltiger was a Bravo Cat, who lived upon a barge: / In fact he was the roughest cat that ever roamed at large" (Eliot, 1980: 151). The term *Bravo Cat* characterizes a cat that displays especial bravado. Name as identifier of type (evidently there are other *Bravo Cats* but only one *Growltiger*) is a function that resides outside of Eliot's categories. Granted his reputation as a ruffian, Growltiger has earned the nickname *Bravo Cat*. A third name is introduced when Old Possum relates how Growltiger "rejoice[d] in his title of 'The Terror of the Thames'" (1980: 151). *The Terror of the Thames* is a designation similar to the *Duchess of York* or the *Earl of Gloucester*. A title implies distinction and may link a person — or cat — geographically to a particular region or river. Titles lie outside the realms of the familial, the particular, and the secretive established by Eliot. Though not exclusively a British tradition, inherited or bestowed titles are hallmarks of Great Britain; indeed, T. S. Eliot was awarded the British Order of Merit in 1948 and bears the post-nominal title *OM*. Thus, within the first stanza alone, we are informed of this cat's three names; however, only one, *Growltiger*, derives from the poet's schematic.

Additionally, breed names — another category absent from the poet's classification system — appear in the poem as various cats, domestic and foreign, gather aboard ship. Breed names include *Persian* and *Siamese*. Prior to battle, we learn that Growltiger's "bucko mate, GRUMBUSKIN" and his "bosom, TUMBLEBRUTUS" (Eliot, 1980: 152) — both obviously particular names — have abandoned ship. The names are descriptive in a manner similar to *Growltiger*: a brute that tumbles is a *Tumblebrutus*. While the rest of his feline crew sleep "in their barrels and their bunks" (1980: 152), Growltiger defends his deck. An international incident ensues when a cat named "[...] Gilbert gave the signal to his fierce Mongolian horde; / [and] With a frightful burst of fireworks the Chinks they swarmed aboard" (1980: 152). The *Mongolian horde* and the *Chinks* refer to the *Persians* and the *Siamese*; thus even breeds merit nicknames, albeit derogatory remnants of Great Britain's imperial history. Growltiger's hatred of foreign cats is explicit, "To Cats of foreign name and race no quarter was allowed" (1980: 152), but Eliot offers a cautionary tale about

bigotry when it is Growltiger that walks the plank. The origin of the name *Gilbert* remains less certain. The name may be Eliot's nod to British librettist W. S. Gilbert (1836–1911), who teamed with composer Sir Arthur Sullivan (1842–1900) to create comic operas. On-deck antics in "Growltiger's Last Stand" are reminiscent of scenes in *H. M. S. Pinafore* (1878) and *The Pirates of Penzance* (1879) (Gilbert, 1994). *Gilbert* is the lone familial name in the poem, but whether he is of Persian or Siamese extraction, or perhaps a British defector, is indeterminate. What is certain is that the varied onomastic terrain of this poem exceeds the boundaries of Eliot's system.

Establishing a distinctly British nomenclature

In addition to Eliot's three categories and pertinent to each is a further source, essentially the Ur-source for the feline names in *Practical Cats*: England, its history, its culture, and its people. As Belmore Schwartz noted in his early review, "The poems are not only about cats, but about English cats. Moreover, they are poems not for any children, but for English children, for they refer to such objects as pubs, area windows, the Admiralty, Indian colonels, and numerous London place names" (1939: 737). Schwartz's assessment of nationality, both for cats and children, is accurate. The cat poems' initial audience included Eliot's godson, Tom Faber, "who as a child, had heard Eliot read *Cats*" (Gordon, 1998: 525) and goddaughter Alison Tandy, who received cat poems in the post signed *Old Possum* (Gordon, 1998: 687–688). Both children were offspring of the poet's British friends. However, references to "area windows" and "the Admiralty" do not exclude readership beyond Britannia. In fact, the 1939 edition was limited neither to England nor to children. Initially published, and subsequently republished, in both London and New York, the book's audience included Americans as well as British, and its readers were adults as well as children. Much of the appeal for readers of Eliot's volume derives from recognizing distinctly British environs and practices from references within the poems. Many a child in Eliot's birth state, Missouri, can identify Buckingham Palace and Big Ben prior to naming Mount Rushmore or the Liberty Bell — the latter landmarks distinctly under-represented in children's verse. And many a child can identify distinctly British names for cats, *c*. 1930s London, by reading or being read poems from *Practical Cats*.

   While no cat is featured chasing mice through Westminster Abbey or dipping its paw into the baptismal font at St Paul's Cathedral, Eliot's conversion to the Anglican faith and his dedication to its doctrines is a presence in this volume. Despite critical dismissal of the poems as "'just' nonsense verse or children's poetry" (Campbell and Reesman, 1984: 26) or "evidence of the lesser-known playfulness of T. S. Eliot" (Dale, 2008: 99), the poems are not mere secular fluff with entertainment their chief occupation. On a theological level, the poems, despite their whimsy or perhaps because of it, allow reflection upon weightier matters. Sewell proposes that "sly theological eddies wander through the Possum book" (1958: 56), often via Eliot's onomastic choices. Names of certain cats have biblical origins and other cat names evoke the spiritual.

   The seventh poem, "Old Deuteronomy," derives its name from the Old Testament book. An ancient cat, Old Deuteronomy is the chief patriarch in Eliot's pride. Old Possum connects Old Deuteronomy's biblical origin with monarchal heritage: "He

was famous in proverb and famous in rhyme / A long while before Queen Victoria's accession" (Eliot, 1980: 157). The accolade "famous in proverb" suggests the cat is endowed with wisdom akin to Solomon. If Old Deuteronomy lived "a long while before" Victoria became queen in 1837, Eliot's cat would be alive beyond his hundredth year, a poetic, if not physical, possibility. More evidence of Old Deuteronomy's longevity is provided numerically. He is a husband who has "buried nine wives," although Old Possum is "[...] tempted to say, ninety-nine; / And his numerous progeny prospers and thrives" (1980: 157). But Old Deuteronomy also transcends temporal boundaries for he "[...] has lived many lives in succession" (1980: 157). *Deuteronomy* means ten, a number infrequently associated with cats, and the extra digit appears to endow Deuteronomy the cat with immortality. Even human counterparts are surprised by the cat's continuance as one elder admits, "My mind may be wandering, but I confess / I *believe* it is Old Deuteronomy!" (198: 158). The word "confess" and the emphasized "believe" further the poem's religious connotations. References to Old Deuteronomy's longevity awaken thoughts of long-lived biblical prophets, of Abraham and Moses. Certainly, Old Deuteronomy exceeds the nine lives typically accorded a cat. Attached to Eliot's numerical name is a catechism lesson about honoring elders, feline and human, as repositories of wisdom and bulwarks of faith.

Other poems in *Practical Cats* reference the New Testament. Eliot's prescription that every cat must possess three names relates to the essential mystery of his Anglican faith, the Holy Trinity, a unity comprised of God the Father, God the Son, and God the Holy Spirit. In each triad, the third name is "ineffable" (Sewell, 1958: 56). Thus the private soul-centered name of the cat resembles the concealed Holy Spirit that dwells within believers and whose name — and being — is likewise beyond words. In the cat poems, Eliot's view of God is positive rather than punitive, reflective of the New Testament doctrine of divine forgiveness. Sewell notes the poems' transcendent features:

> In this so-called minor work can be found all the love and charity which cause Mr Eliot, as Nonsense poet, so much trouble in the rest of his poetry, but released and reconciled. Here too, sin is behovely [...] but all shall be well; and there is set moving in "The Song of the Jellicles" [...] a dance so free and loving and joyful, yet quiet and half-secretive, that it is a clear image of heaven, and an invitation hither. (1958: 56)

Eliot does not provide individual names, familial or particular, for his celestial dancers in "The Song of the Jellicles"; however, the name of the troop verges on the ineffable or spiritual name as *Jellicle* phonetically resembles *angelical*. The adjective *angelical* becomes by the subtraction of its first syllable the name *Jellicle*.

Eliot's angelic cats have devilish counterparts. Because Eliot's names provide few clear signposts, boundaries between saint and sinner blur: "The cat poems suggest that easy distinctions cannot be made between good and evil — that personalities, feline or human, are complex" (Campbell and Reesman, 1984: 31). While certain cat names sound ominous, such as *Growltiger* and *Lady Griddlebone*, other names for disreputable cats are less menacing. In "Macavity: The Mystery Cat," playful names belie the featured cat's unlawful activities. Macavity's nicknames — the *Hidden Paw* and the *Napoleon of Crime* — reflect his occupation, but convey little threat. Eliot

based Macavity on "Sherlock Holmes' archenemy Moriarty" (Lambert, 1990: 40), but the poet's feline version is more comical than criminal. Name as identifier of personality is provided in the statement "Macavity is a Mystery Cat" (Eliot, 1980: 163). Additional descriptors define the traits of a *Mystery Cat*: "master criminal," "the bafflement of Scotland Yard," "a fiend in feline shape, a monster of depravity," a cat that has "broken every human law" as well as the "law of gravity" (1980: 163). Significantly, Macavity's classification as a *Mystery Cat* refers to his skill at avoiding detection. Here Eliot may allude to a stereotype, the elusive Scotsman. That Macavity is Scottish is suggested not only by the first syllable of his name, but also by his appearance. He is a "ginger cat" with "whiskers [...] uncombed" (1980: 163). Evidence of Macavity's ethnicity is bolstered by his connection to Professor Moriarty; this villain's creator, Sir Arthur Conan Doyle (1859–1930), was Scottish. Cats whose naughty antics are chronicled in separate poems are identified as Macavity's accomplices. Lady Griddlebone and Mungojerrie "[a]re nothing more than agents for the Cat who all the time / Just controls their operations: the Napoleon of Crime!" (1980: 164). By presenting his feline felons as likable and possibly redeemable creatures, Eliot refrains from judgment. In these poems "[...] 'evil' cats can be good, and 'good' cats can be evil. Nonsense verse may contain strange mysteries [...]" (Campbell and Reesman, 1984: 33).

If the theology expressed in *Practical Cats* echoes the tenets of the Anglican Church, additional institutions and practices that are distinctly British also permeate the collection and influence name choices. London is a city of abbeys and cathedrals, but it also contains theatres and concert halls. Performing cats abound; they conjure, sing, dance, and act. The clownishly named *Mungojerrie* and *Rumpelteazer* are described by Eliot in circus terminology. Engaged in acts of theft, they are "quick-change comedians, tight-rope walkers and acrobats" (Eliot, 1980: 156). In "Gus: The Theatre Cat," a single cat's names appear as numerous as his onstage roles. The humble nickname *Gus* is an abbreviated version of his familial name *Asparagus*. As Old Possum notes of the original moniker, "That's such a fuss / To pronounce, that we usually call him just Gus" (1980: 164). That an animal should bear a vegetable name is comical, but Gus's status as a working theatrical cat, whether "the lead, or in character parts" (1980: 165), furthers both humorous and onomastic potentialities.

To establish a sense of authenticity in a nonsensical poem, Eliot inserts the names of esteemed but deceased actors. Though Gus "once was a Star of the highest degree" (Eliot, 1980: 164), now he is an aging thespian whose vitality and fame are in decline. Thus Gus enhances his celebrity through namedropping, boasting "[h]e has acted with Irving, he's acted with Tree" (1980: 164), references to Sir Henry Irving (1838–1905) and Sir Herbert Beerbohm Tree (1852–1917), legends of the British stage with whom readers at the time of the volume's initial publication would have been familiar (Wilson and Goldfarb, 2004: 402). Gus most resembles Tree, who in late Victorian times was lauded for his versatility in character roles, but whose skills were considered old-fashioned by the dawn of the twentieth century. That character-actor Gus has experienced similar disrespect in an era of modern productions is conveyed in his lamentation:

> [...] "Now, these kittens, they do not get trained
> As we did in the days when Victoria reigned.
> They never get drilled in a regular troupe,
> And they think they are smart, just to jump through a hoop." (Eliot, 1980: 165)

No mere hoop-jumper, Gus's apex as an actor was his portrayal of the doubly named "Firefrorefiddle, the Fiend of the Fell" (1980: 65). *Firefrorefiddle* identifies the character Gus enacted, while *Fiend of the Fell* offers clues to his character's personality, a devilish creature, and to his origins in the uncultivated regions of Northern England known as the fell. These two names are connected further through alliteration, the repetition of the "f" sound connoting associations with the devil: *fire*, *fiddle* (an instrument the devil is purported to play), *fiend*, and *fell* (suggestive of Lucifer's fall from heaven and a rhyme for *hell*). Part of the role's appeal to Gus resides in its very name-ability.

Aside from Firefrorefiddle, Gus's career was comprised of nameless roles identified only by association with human names; in these productions he functioned chiefly as a prop. Gus played the cat "by the bedside of poor Little Nell," the tiger "an Indian Colonel pursued down a drain," and he walked the boards in an unspecified drama by Shakespeare "[w]hen some actor suggested the need for a cat" (1980: 165). With this list Gus engages in additional namedropping — via literary references — to inflate the importance of his roles. Not only is Gus now a Shakespearian actor, he has appeared in adaptations of reputable British fiction. Little Nell is the suffering daughter in *The Old Curiosity Shop* (1841) by Charles Dickens (1812–1870). The tiger episode appears in Doyle's "The Adventure of the Empty House" (1903), a Sherlock Holmes story. Additionally, Gus brags he "once understudied Dick Whittington's Cat" (1980: 165), which Roger Dale describes as "one of those peculiarly English entertainments, the pantomime" (2008: 31). Popular during the Victorian era, "Dick Whittington's Cat" features a rat-catching feline — typically portrayed by a human — that helps his master become Lord Mayor of London. These references confirm Gus's credentials as a London thespian and reveal Eliot's predilection for his adopted culture's literary and theatrical entertainments.

While "Gus: The Theatre Cat" contains feline puns — Gus "knew how to let the cat out of the bag" (Eliot, 1980: 165) and "the Gallery once gave him seven cat-calls" (1980: 164) — it also contains pathos. This combination is emblematic of the masks of comedy and tragedy associated with the theatre and with a stage career. If life as an actor has brought Gus a degree of happiness, it has also left him bereft. That Gus served as understudy for "Dick Whittington's Cat" suggests that a better cat, or at least a better actor, received the part. A sense of sadness pervades his chronicle: "For he isn't the Cat that he was in his prime; / Though his name was quite famous, he says, in its time" (1980: 164). The words "he says" emphasize an onomastic fame doubly outlived as Gus serves as his own historian. Simultaneously the words cast doubt on the veracity of his memories. Gus alone recalls his celebrated name and he may exaggerate his acclaim.

Still other British establishments offer Eliot fodder for naming his cats and developing their personalities. London's neighborhoods provide fertile ground for feline escapades. While Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer operate out of Victoria Grove, this burgling pair are "known in Cornwall Gardens, in / Launceston Place and in Kensington Square" (1980: 156). London's working-class environs are reflected in names like *Bustopher Jones* and *Gus*. The British Bobby appears in the persona of the *Great Rumpuscat* when he breaks up a fight between canine street gangs. Nonsense names such as *Rum Tum Tugger*, *Skimbleshanks*, and *Grumbuskin* suggest

nicknames acquired on cricket fields or bestowed in pubs. Eliot's familial names include monarchal Christian names, *James* and *George*, while other familial names, *Admetus* and *Electra*, recall the foundation of British civilization via the Roman invasion.

The majority of feline names in *Old Possum's Book of Practical Cats* derive from British culture, whether their origins are religious (reflective of Anglican beliefs), historic (reflective of ancestry), literary (reflective of the Nonsense tradition), or geographic (reflective of place). Certainly these names exemplify T. S. Eliot's embrasure of his adopted home and chosen citizenry. That British culture informed the composition of Eliot's cat poems is most clearly demonstrated in the poet's onomastic choices.

Appendix A: Cat Names

Peter	Admetus	Jennyanydots	Rum Tum Tugger	Macavity	Cat about Town
Augustus	Electra	Growltiger	Curious Cat	Mystery Cat	Bustopher Jones
Alonzo	Demeter	Bravo Cat	Jellicle Cats	Hidden Paw	St James Street Cat
James	Munkustrap	Terror of the Thames	Mungojerrie	Napoleon of Crime	Brummell of Cats
Victor	Quaxo	Persian	Rumpelteazer	Gus	Skimbleshanks
Jonathan	Coricopat	Siamese	Old Deuteronomy	Theatre Cat	Skimble
George	Bombalurina	Grumbuskin	Great Rumpuscat	Asparagus	Railway Cat
Bill Bailey	Jellylorum	Tumblebrutus	Mr Mistoffelees	Firefrorefiddle	O Cat
Plato	Gumbie Cat	Lady Griddlebone	Conjuring Cat	Fiend of the Fell	Oopsa Cat

Appendix B: Poem Titles

The Naming of Cats
The Old Gumbie Cat
Growltiger's Last Stand
The Rum Tum Tugger
The Song of the Jellicles
Mungojerrie and Rumpelteazer
Old Deuteronomy
Of the Awefull Battle of the Pekes and the Pollicles: Together with Some Account of the Participation of the Pugs and the Poms, and the Intervention of the Great Rumpuscat
Mr Mistoffelees
Macavity: the Mystery Cat
Gus: the Theatre Cat
Bustopher Jones: the Cat about Town
Skimbleshanks: the Railway Cat
The Ad-dressing of Cats

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